Jim Byrnes – My Walking Stick (2009)

1 Ol' Rattler 2 Walk On Boy 3 My Walking Stick 4 Lookin' For A Love 5 Ophelia 6 Talk In Circles 7 Three Shots 8 Lonely Blue Boy (Danny's Song) 9 Drown In My Own Tears 10 I'm Living Off The Love You Give 11 What Are They Doing In Heaven Today? 12 I Want My Crown 13 One Life (Creole Poetry) Jim Byrnes - Composer, Guitars (Acoustic), Pedal Steel Guitar, Vocals Matt Chamberlain - Drums, Percussion Steve Dawson - Banjo, Bass (Upright), Glockenspiel, Guitars, Lap Steel Guitar, Mellotron, Percussion, Pump Organ, Slide Guitar, Ukulele Chris Gestrin - Organ, Pump Organ, Tack Piano, Wurlitzer Stephen Hodges - Drums, Percussion Keith Lowe - Bass (Upright), Double Bass Lindsay Mitchell - Guitar (Electric) John Reischman - Mandolin Sojourners - Vocals Jeanne Tolmie - Vocals Jesse Zubot - Viola, Violin

It's impossible to say whether the St. Louis born and raised Byrnes would have found more success in the States had he stayed there than in Vancouver, where he moved a few decades ago and remains as of this recording's 2009 release. Like fellow countryman Colin Linden and the Band (whose "Ophelia" he covers here), Byrnes assimilates a variety of Americana influences, filters them through his grizzled, often spiritually based viewpoint, and delivers a wonderfully diverse disc, surely the equal of, and arguably better than, his 2007 Juno award-winning Album of the Year House of Refuge. Byrnes has found a sympathetic partner in guitarist/multi-instrumentalist producer Steve Dawson who also owns the Black Hen label that has provided Byrnes with a stable home for his music since 2004's Fresh Horses. There are a few originals, but the majority of My Walking Stick is comprised of wildly eclectic covers from dissimilar sources such as Irving Berlin, the Valentinos, Ray Charles, Conway Twitty, and Mel Tillis. Despite the varied material nabbed from different decades, the album coheres due to Byrnes' and Dawson's infallible sense of direction, and a rustic, sonic landscape that, like Linden's, keeps the sound rootsy yet not musty. Double bassist Keith Lowe and Tom Waits' drummer Stephen Hodges create the shadowy pocket, while Byrnes' powerful salt-and-pepper vocals and Dawson's firm grip on guitars and especially arrangements take the dusky spotlight. Much of this is blues based, such as the riveting version of Charles' "Drown in My Own Tears," but that is just one of the ingredients that make these tunes connect. There are strong hints of Cyril Neville and even Joe Cocker in Byrnes' voice, and he's just as soulful as both, especially

when tackling R&B influenced material like the Stax nugget "Living Off the Love You Give" (best known by Little Milton) and the Valentinos' "Lookin' for a Love." Gospel vocalists the Sojourners return from Byrnes' previous album to bring a churchy angle that sets this firmly in Americana soil. They also take lead on a cover of the traditional "What are They Doing in Heaven Today?," one of a few deeply religious tracks that infuses intense honesty and passion into these performances. The songs are bound by a vague lyrical thread of working-class folks searching for love and salvation while refusing to be deterred by life's roadblocks, a reasonable metaphor for Byrnes' own hard knocks career. It's a consistently engaging hour-long set that, like any formidable work, demands repeated listens to expose its deeper layers. ---Hal Horowitz, AllMusic Review

download (mp3 @320 kbs):

yandex mediafire uloz.to global-files

back